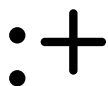


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**Golgota Picnic and the Framework of Public
Discourse: Performing Democracy and Managing
Social Indignation**

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Elżbieta Matynia's book *Performative Democracy*, which seeks to describe changes that led to the social mobilization of the first Solidarity period in Poland, begins with a chapter on theatre activity in the 1970s.¹ Matynia's narrative develops the argument that actions of experimental theatres – which transgressed boundaries between actors and audience, directly engaging the latter, and moved beyond traditional theatre spaces – accustomed consumers to more complete participation and engagement in public life. They taught them the performing of democracy, which became the essence of mass social movement. It is worth recalling this extremely optimistic picture of effects that theatre can have when we think about the stakes of events surrounding the cancelled production of Rodrigo García's *Golgota Picnic* planned for the programme of the Malta Festival in Poznań in June 2014. It has become something of a truism that 'the *Golgota Picnic* affair' became a lens focusing diverse problems in contemporary Poland. But what is particularly significant is that all these issues can be grasped from the perspective of the common theme of the shape of contemporary public discourse in the country.

Protests against the presentation of García's play and against readings of the script or screenings of recordings are two forms of social mobilization encompassed in an ideological dispute in the public space. Public debate over the production was something of a culmination of a series of previous events – for instance, attacks on the artist Julita Wójcik's outdoor installation *Tęcza* [Rainbow] in central Warsaw, as well as conflicts at the Stary Theatre in Kraków and legal proceedings against popular musicians identified with the 'decline of culture' (including Dorota Rabczewska and Adam Darski) – and it became a test of social mobilization capacities of various communities and their participation in public life. Numerous institutions also mobilized, occupying diverse places in the debate.

A feeling common to various institutions and individuals has been the precedent-setting nature of the situation and uncertainty as to the legality and propriety of the actions and practices undertaken. A quarter century after the founding of the Third Polish Republic in 1989, its citizens and institutions do not know how to go about conducting debate and undertaking dialogue in the public space. This lack of knowledge was especially visible in the actions of the Malta Festival management,

1 Elżbieta Matynia, *Performative Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

which bears responsibility for the crisis in public dialogue linked to the 'affair' of the García production.

This situation is now ripe for exploitation by right-wing fraud, generally by marginal politicians brandishing categories of offence to religious sentiment, offence to the nation, infringement upon moral norms, etc., as if they were swords. Yet it is not their activity – analysed by Krystyna Duniec, Wojtek Zralek-Kossakowski and Iwo Zmyslony – that interests me, but rather authentically offended people involved in protests to defend values organized by right-wing circles.² As exponents of social protest, they are far more interesting in terms of the question of the possibility of pursuing left-wing politics in Poland (also reflected around 2010 in dreams of forming a 'Smolensk left' in response to the crash of the Polish presidential jetliner in Russia, as well as in recurring slogans of building a left based on emotional community).³ First and foremost, this article is about these problems with collective performing of public dispute, and the possibility of articulating dissent to the prevailing order.

Are Poles capable of mobilizing?

A theory of contemporary Polish society that has been lingering harmfully for years regards the paucity of social activity among Poles, and the deficit of 'civil society' manifested by insufficient engagement in public affairs. According to this narrative, Poles only mobilize for specific events (for example, the death of Pope John Paul II, and protests against the ACTA treaty), but in general they remain a set of atomized and depoliticized groups and individuals. But this is based on an archaic understanding of politics, which allows on one hand for peculiar slogans such as 'Enough Politics, Let's Build Bridges/roads/schools/Poland', and on the other permits protests and manifestations to be pushed out of the political sphere and their participants to be labelled 'troublemakers' with a 'sense of entitlement'.

Only with demonstrations following the Smolensk crash were public opinion, the media and commentators aware of how many Poles are involved in operating numerous institutions comprising politics, deciding on the form of public debate and exerting pressure on social and moral issues. And only then came the first serious examinations of organizations associated with the Catholic Church or communities of football-fans (a term with negative connotations in Polish). These institutions display diverse potential for party mobilization, but at the same time a considerable potential for mobilization in matters connected to moral politics and management of collective historical memory.

The '*Golgota Picnic* affair' is one of a host of examples of this right-wing social mobilization featuring specific types of institutions. It resulted from the activity of several centres with overlapping influences: local political organizations of parties from Law and Justice (PiS) to the extremist National Radical Camp (ONR), institutions associated with local church hierarchy, and finally organizations and associations founded

2 Krystyna Duniec, 'Zniżka cywilizacyjna', *Dwutygodnik.com* 2014, 135; Wojtek Zralek-Kossakowski, 'Piknik i panika', *Dziennik Opinii*, 26 June 2014; Iwo Zmyslony, 'Wolność i resentment. Dlaczego posłów PiS szkodzi sztuka współczesna?', *Kultura Liberalna* 2013, 25.

3 Agata Czarnacka, 'Lewica smoleńska', *Lewica.24*, 4 March 2013; Krzysztof Nawratek, 'Poza histerię, poza cynizm', *Dziennik Opinii* 13 April 2010.

from football-fan communities, for whose attentions local church and party institutions compete. Usually ordinary politicians or association and foundation members associated with the church are the first to inform the media and other institutions of the apparent threat of religious profanation. Next to join the fray are national third-sector organizations using contemporary methods to promote moral conservatism (for example, CitizenGO and right-wing press circles), whose input spreads information about the perceived threat to the right-wing community engaged in public life nationwide. The next stage involves efforts to mobilize football-fan communities by including organizations integrating fans in issues of right-wing historical politics.

In the case of *Golgota Picnic*, mobilization strategies employed – public appearances by parliament members, open letters, community agitation by organizations linked to the church, media statements by the church hierarchy, threats of large-scale demonstrations involving football fans – had already been put to use in diverse situations such as:

1. mass prayers in Warsaw at a cross installed on Krakowskie Przedmieście Street and gatherings on the tenth day of each month to honour late President Lech Kaczyński, his wife, Maria, and others who died in the Smolensk jetliner crash (of 10 April 2010)
2. nationalist Independence Day marches on the anniversary of Poland's regaining sovereignty after the First World War
3. conservative protests targeting the retrospective exhibition of critical art since the 1990s by Katarzyna Kozyra at the National Museum in Kraków.

Commentaries on conflicts about contemporary visual arts tend to emphasize the activity of right-wing politicians who proclaim offence against religious sentiment, quoting a relevant legal statute. Such situations are connected with previous attempts at censoring critical art in the 1990s. The legal statute against offending religious sentiment meant any artwork could be accused of offending a given person by infringing upon the Catholic symbolic sphere, defined in any way. Since the 1990s, parliament members from right-wing parties have used this article to earn political capital. These political activities have been accompanied by an informal, incessant festival of performance of ideological contestation of contemporaneity in public space.

From this point of view, what was new in the *Golgota Picnic* situation was the mobilization of liberal and left-wing communities, based on the actions of employees of culture institutions. These spontaneous actions led to a chain of events that went well beyond Poland's borders. Working across established hierarchies and institutions, 'culture workers' became an active force in the dispute, making it possible to express opposition to the right-wing narrative to the demands of which the Malta Festival management had submitted.

Are Poles capable of arguing?

If I perceive a distinct deficit today in forms of participation of Poles in public life, this is above all a deficit of language and conventions in articulating opposition. Many institutions emerge – I have diverse opinions about them – which carry out various actions in the political space, yet there is an evident lack of ways of expressing demands, performing

opposition, expressing anger, etc. A good example is much-vaunted protests against the ACTA treaty, seen as an exceptional manifestation of mass social protest beyond political divides – a protest that mobilized social circles previously not involved in public life. This was a meeting of various communities using different forms of practice in public space. During protests at the Warsaw headquarters of the European Parliament, actions employed in the past – collecting of signatures on protest letters, mobilization on social networks, wearing Anonymous masks – were shown to be a spent force. In the mass gathering, these were replaced by practices with historical origins in protest movements, which in modern Poland are mostly part of stadium culture: choral slogan chants and mass jumping. These led to confusion among participants who thought the protest had been taken over by football fans.

Meanwhile, rituals associated with monthly commemorations of the Smolensk jetliner crash demonstrate a performative language of opposition with roots deep in church traditions: vigil, processions, prayers and songs instead of chants. Of course traditions of mass protest have profound structural links to traditional religious practices in general, yet what seems important in this case is the more direct tradition of the Catholic Church's engagement in Solidarity protests of the 1980s. For participants in commemorations of the Smolensk crash, this tradition forms the natural language of manifesting their own beliefs in public space, and thus also the natural language of protest.

At this point, we should make it clear that in the 1990s, left-wing, workers' and farmers' traditions of social protest were compromised. Protests of trade unions were reduced to miners burning tyres, which became a symbol of hooliganism; farmers' protests turned into dumping grain and blockades, regarded as a symbol of loutish, troublemaking behaviour. When these traditions of performing opposition – on one hand, the workers' strike, on the other, farmers' rebellion – were ridiculed, discredited or painted in the public imagination as being backward, this left a vacuum then filled by practices transferred from churches and stadiums. To paraphrase Chantal Mouffe, we can state that owing to the lack of an acknowledged alternative to the dominant hegemonic order, those seeking to express opposition to it find no valid forms of expression, and invoke identity practices based solely on declarations of this antagonistic opposition.⁴

Mouffe's ideas are based on the premise that the essence of thinking politically is social conflicts (antagonisms), and that it is therefore these that should be at the centre of every project of radical democracy (which is what she thinks contemporary leftist thought should aspire to). According to this view, antagonisms are an irremovable dimension of the functioning of human communities, therefore the illusion of forming left-wing, conflict-free societies should be dispelled. Such projects lead to the depoliticization of a community; they therefore contain an antidemocratic element. Meanwhile, the task of radical democracy is to create the framework in which antagonisms can be articulated not as a conflict between enemies excluding discussion (the so-called antagonism proper), but in the 'agonistic forms' of public debate: in disputes between

4 Chantal Mouffe, Ernesto Laclau, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985); Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (London and New York: Verso, 2013).

‘adversaries who recognize the legitimacy of the demands of their opponent’.⁵ The articulation of debate is of fundamental significance: when it is impeded, society becomes hostage to antidemocratic depoliticization in the name of hegemonic ideology in current political discourse.

Let us recall what the artist Artur Żmijewski said about a similar problem in the context of the public space of Krakowskie Przedmieście Street in central Warsaw, where Poles of all world views spontaneously gathered following the presidential-jetliner crash at Smolensk:

For me that was an event of a political nature, but there was a lack of a political ritual and comprehensive language of mourning that could also include something for the secular part of society. People immediately fell into the trap of open churches, prayers, the presence of priests in the media, attempts to relate the entire event – and make sense of it – through the mouths of bishops.⁶

Żmijewski sees a problem in suspending the political nature of a community during the time in which society deals with a traumatic event. Appeals to ‘suspend disputes’ and ‘unite the nation’ took away the political from the community and subjected it to the binding discourse. But using the same example, we also see the limits of hegemony: the state of post-political unity was very short-lived and quickly became a point of reference transformed into a myth. The hegemonic discourse revealed its internal fractures, demonstrating that it is a bundle of separate narratives that resulted from the balance of power in authority. The effect was at least two models for the mourning process, competing for the dominant position while constantly invoking the unity of society.⁷ The inability to articulate antagonism led to a deferred conflict that, despite initial hopes that Krakowskie Przedmieście Street would become an arena of agonistic performance of democracy, assumed antagonistic forms. This inability to articulate was also visible in searches for a new performative language of opposition made by people who remained at the cross placed in front of the Presidential Palace to perform their opposition. The community that had gathered there experimented with forms of collective performance, the rituals they developed proving so strong that they led to a rebellion against the church hierarchy during official attempts negotiated between presidential officials and Warsaw authorities of the church to move the cross to a chapel.⁸ The congregation saw the cross as belonging to them, the arrangement between secular and religious powers as infringing their property. This rebellion was characterized by protesters’ appropriation of public space – it was not Catholicism that appropriated the space of the secular state but a group of radicals that seized the symbolism of Catholicism to establish their presence in the centre of the capital’s political space. For them, the normalization of carnival social relations in the space before of the Presidential Palace – that is, removing the cross to the space of the church – represented an aspersion. The antagonism revealed at the cross was a voice of opposition under slogans of

5 Mouffe, *Agonistics*, p. 138.

6 Artur Żmijewski in conversation with Jan Smoleński, ‘Za religijną otoczką stoi świecka potrzeba uczestnictwa’, *Dziennik Opinii*, 4 March 2011.

7 Dariusz Kosiński, *Teatra polskie. Rok katastrofy* (Kraków, Warsaw: Znak and the Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, 2013), pp. 127–133.

8 Kosiński, pp. 236–257.

‘truth’ and ‘authenticity’, testified to not only by the slogans ‘We demand the truth’ and ‘This is Poland’ (meaning ‘the real’, ‘authentic’ one) but also by the characteristic cries ‘We are not actors’.⁹

This last slogan is especially interesting. One consequence of the fact that any serious articulation of opposition to changes in the 1990s was blocked in the newly established Third Republic in Poland was something known from the histories of other peripheral and semi-peripheral countries, as representatives of ‘culture’ in its broadest sense were discursively placed in the role of emissaries of moral disintegration flowing in from countries at the economic-cultural centre.¹⁰ Similar processes occur in Poland. Archbishop Wiktor Skworc, for example, writes in a pastoral letter that the problem of society is people who ‘under the cloak of pseudo-culture and art blaspheme God and His word, offend believers, promote immoral behaviour by connecting it with entertainment so that it seems less threatening’.¹¹ Right-wing masses, following right-wing elites, find one enemy in ‘elites’ identified with a phantasmatic, distorted image of ‘culture workers’ described as a ‘homo-elite’, ‘ultra-lefties’, etc. ‘Culture workers’ are attributed characteristics testifying to their moral decay: drunkenness, licentiousness, blurring of gender and sexual identities, etc. They become a group to whom social attention can be directed to provoke – tactically – moral unrest. The activity of cultural institutions creates a potential ideological battlefield against infringing the norms of the unwritten social contract, over ‘good taste’, ‘public morality’ and ‘tradition’ identified with the conservative lifestyle championed by one side yet, in social reality, far less widespread than they claim.¹²

Are Polish cultural institutions capable of defending themselves from the pressure?

Protests in Poznań in 2014 against Rodrigo García’s play made use of diverse contemporary methods of political pressure. Representatives of rightist parties and organizations spoke in the media and in the Sejm (the Polish parliament), while Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki wrote an open letter filled with veiled threats. A major aspect of the pressure comprised protest practices invoking religion and solidarity-based tradition, but the greatest crisis came from fear of displays of football-stadium tactics. The decision to cancel the production was arrived at after threats of football-fan demonstrations and pressure from the public administration, who suggested that acts of violence might occur that could get out of hand and for which the authorities would not accept

9 Kosiński, p. 244. The author points out that during the presidential campaign, categories of ‘truth’, ‘authenticity’ and ‘falsehood’ played a fundamental role on both sides of the right-wing political debate, as well as being the starting point for criticism of Ewa Stankiewicz’s film *Solidarni 2010* and for conservative leader Jarosław Kaczyński’s behaviour during the campaign. Kosiński, pp. 187–200.

10 This mechanism is described magnificently by Norbert Elias with reference to 18th-century Germany, analysing tension between understanding and the use of the concepts ‘civilization’, taken from French court culture, and native ‘culture’, a product of modern German bourgeoisie. Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 60–107.

11 *Pod płaszczykiem pseudokultury i sztuki bluźnią bogu...*, source: PAP, www.tvn24.pl, 26 February 2012.

12 See Patrycja Antosz, *Równe traktowanie standardem dobrego rządzenia. Raport z badań sondażowych*, website of the Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment.

responsibility. The police department stated unequivocally that it would be unable to guarantee safety, and the mayor also pointed to the risk of acts of violence.

In 2005, Mayor Ryszard Grobelny of Poznań – unlawfully, as courts would later pronounce – had refused permission for an Equality March to be held in the city. Activists then tried to march as an act of civil disobedience. The police prevented demonstrators from doing so, but also protected them from assault at the hands of nationalists groups and football-fan communities. Aleksander Nowacki, a performer participating in the protest (privately, a liberal conservative) recalls that he – unlike protesting anarchists, for example – was happy when the police began to arrest demonstrators, as he sensed that this was the only way to emerge from the standoff in one piece.¹³ The memory of this conflict situation, which nearly became an eruption of mass violence, was one of the main factors exerting pressure to cancel the García production in 2014. Poznań society remembered the effects of ‘provocation’ in mobilizing specific groups.

The Malta Festival management bowed to this pressure in a withdrawal in the face of the collusion of threats and the suggestion of administrative acquiescence to violence that was unprecedented in the history of post-transition Poland. In the long term, perhaps this was the best option for the festival, but it was certainly not so for dialogue in public space. It marked a precedent that suggested that ideological discord can constitute a basis for controlling the artistic programme of a cultural institution.

According to an often-repeated opinion in right-wing circles, a latent ‘leftist’ censorship operates in Poland, manifested in the policy of cultural institutions, along with community censorship binding cultural life to a network of informal connections, etc. This narrative employs phrases like ‘stirring up a hornets’ nest’ and treats the world of culture as the field of a political game in which the left is always making offensive provocations, hidden behind claims of artistic freedom.

This type of antagonistic approach assumes – to return to Mouffe’s conceptual field – the replacement of ideological dialogue or debate with elimination of the enemy’s text from the space of public discourse. In other words, a cultural text is dispelled beyond the limits of public discussion as something that cannot be the object of debate as it has already been deemed the object of offence. Here we can cite cultural philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, who treated politics as the sphere of collective management of rage – concepts I will come back to. According to Sloterdijk, after the communist project in liberal democracies was broken, the situation that took hold was one that hampered articulation of important collective emotions, resulting in the ‘homelessness of rage’, which is not included in forms of the political project – ‘the rage bank’.¹⁴ For the nature of public discourse in Poland, this has the consequence that anger and offence in it are channelled directly into images. Religious-rightist

¹³ Aleksander Nowacki, private conversation, 11 February 2015.

¹⁴ ‘The moment that “symptoms” such as pride, indignation, rage, ambition, overzealous self-assertiveness, and acute readiness to fight occur, the member of the *thymos*-forgetting therapeutic culture retreats into a belief that the aggressive people must be victims of a neurotic complex’. Peter Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 17; see also Sloterdijk, pp. 69–110, 227–236.

protests in Poland almost always concern the portrayal of contents engaged in dialogue with the religious *sacrum*: from the juxtaposition of genitals with the cross to tearing up a Bible on stage. Important here is the fact – relevant in the case of the García production – that indignation is invariably caused by individual photos taken out of the context of a full work. Diverse visual representations and performative actions are reduced to frozen frames provoking the power of offence and aversion. Analysing the array of protests produces a vision of visual culture based on accepting the performative power of the image, which can have an acute effect on the viewer, like hate speech in public space: words shouted on the street or visible on walls. Particularly interesting in criticism of these ‘offensive’ images is the tension between the shallowness usually attributed to them and the power of offence. Terms such as ‘shoddy provocation’ are bandied about, yet this arouses great indignation – and therefore it works. Yet the initial premise means that any confrontation with the content of the cultural text becomes groundless, as it would mean relativization of the offence. This leads to protests against an ‘unseen play’, that has not been watched and even should not be. In this, artistic actions are taken out of the context of artistic freedom and treated as disrupting the order or – less frequently – as statements from the order of direct claims about the world.

While considering these types of attitudes, I wondered: do I need to read David Irving’s book in its entirety to know that the author denies Auschwitz then to be able to protest against it? I think not. For me, Irving’s negationism and the fact that he offends values of contemporary Europe is as obvious as the offence resulting from the juxtaposition of a realistically presented naked body with Christian symbolism is to the protestors. The absolutization of offence makes it impossible to differentiate types of statement (artistic, scientific and others) and interpret them in various contexts, with the convention taken into consideration. Using a specific convention does not mean that it cannot be criticized, of course – as indicated by those who defend boorish sexist comments on a satirical radio show¹⁵ – but it is significant in differentiating responsibility. To refer to a specific, very drastic example: I feel that the caricatures in *Charlie Hebdo* should have been criticized much earlier, but this neither justifies the subsequent acts of violence nor means that these drawings should have been censored.

From the point of view of left-wing politics, one cannot hold it against somebody if they feel offended. But one can and ought to oppose protests that take a form that prevents debate. Here we are talking about antagonistic conflict, and thus return to the deficit of a performative language of ideological dispute. It is important to emphasize, though, that a major cause of this deficit is the withdrawal of institutions today from roles they should fill – in the case of *Golgota Picnic*, the hypocrisy of the police and the city officials, as well as the irresponsible approach of the Malta Festival management.

15 On ‘Poranny WF’ [Morning PE] on Antyradio (21 June 2012), DJs and media celebrities Kuba Wojewódzki and Michał Figurski made scandalous comments on Ukrainian women working in Poland. Their statements caused an uproar, with the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry stepping in. Figurski and Wojewódzki later said that their show was intended to expose Polish xenophobia, but the general consensus was that above all it reproduced these stereotypes.

The impropriety of actions by the church, the city of Poznań and the police seems – outside the circles of protestors – to be uncontroversial. More noteworthy is the way the festival authorities then acted. In the introduction to their astonishing book *Golgota Picnic w Polsce. Dokumentacja wydarzeń maj–lipiec 2014* [*Golgota Picnic* in Poland: *Documentation of Events May–July 2014*], Paweł Płoski and Dorota Semenowicz criticize the culture community for leaving the festival on its own at a testing time of political pressure, then becoming active only after the production was cancelled. In response to this, we must note that the informal actions of culture people were the consequence of the failure of an important cultural institution, carrying the weight of social responsibility even as a recipient of public money, to fulfil its duties. The social responsibility of a cultural institution entails – as well as promoting positive employment models – protecting freedom of artistic expression. We can cite the sad example of someone I would rate as one of the best Polish artists of the last twenty-five years. In an article looking at denunciations of Jacek Markiewicz's work *Adoration of the Christ*, shown at the Centre for Contemporary Art (CSW) in Warsaw during the exhibition 'British British Polish Polish' (2013), Iwo Zmysłony refers to the somewhat forgotten history of CSW director Wojciech Krukowski's censorial interference in Andres Serrano's work in 1994, several months after the first exhibition of *Adoration* at CSW.

Unlike Markiewicz – an Academy of Fine Arts graduate then making his debut – Serrano was already regarded as a contemporary great. His individual exhibition was prepared by Milada Ślizińska [...] for three major European institutions – along with CSW, the national galleries in Ljubljana and Bregenz were showing it at the time. Censorship only took place in Warsaw, and only on one piece – *Piss Christ* (1987). Director Krukowski officially deemed it offensive to his own religious feelings. [...] Wojciech Krukowski's actions are a sad case of censorship. Sad, as they were done quietly, from within the art world and by a person who owing to his office should stand guard over its autonomy. Only this history shows what is at stake here – what the freedom of artistic institutions entails and what the consequences of its loss are. Yielding to the humours of radicals certainly allowed Krukowski to avoid the political palaver that would be aroused a few years later by the artworks of Nieznalska and Cattelan. Perhaps it also meant that some grants or good relations with the authorities could be maintained, allowing other important ventures to go on. But the cost was that Polish public opinion was denied the opportunity to evaluate a controversial work and hold an open debate on the subject, and consequently that the discussion on the role of art and position of the church in the civil society developing at the time was nipped in the bud.¹⁶

It was owing to the reaction of 'culture people' to the similar act by the Malta Festival that the matter did not end with the cancellation of the production, but caused a social mobilization that changed the history of the amenability of institutions in the '*Golgota Picnic* affair', a history of nationwide confrontation with various forms of demonstration of ideological opposition. Let us add too that this is the history of a demonstration that did not bring about mass, drastic acts of violence, contrary

¹⁶ Iwo Zmysłony, 'Wolność i resentment'.

to dire warnings of the church hierarchy and fears of the police, although such concerns caused some hastily planned actions to be cancelled.

The main argument that institutions call upon to justify yielding to social pressure is difficulties foreseen in ensuring participants' safety. The festival management were no exception.¹⁷ Yet the social obligation of a cultural institution is above all to ensure the conditions for open discussion, confrontation and exchange of views. Eliminating the possibility of debate is a sign that the institution is neglecting this duty, just as the lack of security at a public event shows that the organizer and/or the police are neglecting theirs. Among the social consequences of this kind of negligence is the destruction of the space of agonistic dialogue – when the hegemonic narrative of security and blocking disputes is in the ascendancy, antagonistic forms become the dominant forms of opposition.

In 2004, Michał Merczyński, in a separate role from his directorship of the Malta Festival, had succumbed to pressure of the Warsaw city council and allowed two sentences to be cut from Anna Augustynowicz's production of the Anthony Neilson play *Stitching* at TR Warszawa. As a result, the next Polish production of the play (directed by Małgorzata Bogajewska at the Jaracz Theatre in Łódź, 2008) did not include this section. This example illustrates very well – even if there is no direct link between the two situations – the long-term effects that this type of decision can have on artistic freedom. We do not have to look far to find an example of such consequences after the Malta Festival situation: in autumn 2014, the rector of the Medical University in Poznań, facing pressure behind the scenes, cancelled the concert of the band Behemoth scheduled at the Eskulap student club. The association Krucjata Młodych [Youth Crusade], backed by right-wing media (including the newspapers *Frona* and *wPolityce*) tried to disrupt the band's entire tour, but only in Poznań were they successful in forcing a cancellation – the reason being, of course, possible threats to participants and the university's good name. However, none of the tour dates was marred by violence, while Catholic opposition towards Behemoth's work was expressed performatively in the form of picketing and public prayer.

Curating social indignation

Let us return for a moment to 2005 and events surrounding the ban on the Equality Parade in Poznań. Discussing this, Aleksander Nowacki had made it clear that he was disappointed not to see the mobilization of more people – especially from Warsaw – to come to Poznań and participate in the march. Did the memory of this event influence subsequent actions of the Malta Festival management? Perhaps, but the later activity of representatives of cultural circles from around Poland contradicts the idea of the festival organizers' isolation – they had many potential allies throughout, but these had to be skilfully mobilized.

In support of 'culture people', recent years have been characterized by an evident desire to engage the institutions of cultural life in the role of intermediaries between the masses in ideological disputes. One example of this tendency was borne out by the ambitions of the exhibition 'New National Art: National-Patriotic Realism in 21st-century Poland' (Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2012), which was to offer a space

¹⁷ See Katarzyna Tórz, 'Nie jesteś tak wolny, jak myślisz*. Polemika z Witoldem Mrozkiem wokół "Golgota Picnic", Malta Festiwal Poznań', Malta-festival.pl.

for discussion and give cultural institutions greater potential for social engagement. One could say that the exhibition, curated by Sebastian Cichocki and Łukasz Ronduda, designed a space for a debate that in the end failed to materialize. Right-wing circles treated that intention with distrust, sensing ridicule in the museum's actions, or the patronizing gaze of the anthropologist.¹⁸

Similar hopes for new engagement had been palpable in the tone of private comments made during protests against the exhibition of Markiewicz's work at CSW in Warsaw. A radical, critical piece that emerged from the aesthetic of the 1990s (of Markiewicz in an erotic embrace with a medieval crucifix from the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw) aroused strong emotions in that decade, yet only with the 'British British Polish Polish' exhibition did public scandal ensue. The difference between this protest against Markiewicz's work and, for example, those against Kozyra's exhibition at the National Museum in Kraków, was the actual confrontation of protestors with the work. While the Kozyra exhibition was picketed by protestors who did not even see it, Markiewicz's work also led, in addition to picketing, to communal prayers at the exhibition. Moreover, this practice of protest meant that participants could demonstrate their opinion in public space without the need to withdraw the art from the exhibition – de facto, therefore, this was an action in accordance with the logic of agonistic dispute.

For me, the transitory, private reactions demonstrating recognition of these specific protest practices are of particular symbolic importance – above all, they show an interest in developing performative practices of public demonstration of ideological disagreement with concrete artistic actions and opposition to the policy of all kinds of institutions of authority. This interest meant that so long as no part of the exhibition was destroyed the tone of most comments remained positive. Even if it was suggested that these actions are a form of symbolic violence, the predominant conviction was that this particular model of protest balances on the right side of the dividing line between manifesting opposition and imposing ideological pressure. Markiewicz was fascinated with the agitation that his work caused, documenting this event:

Yes, I enjoyed the second life of the work. The people praying complemented and enhanced it, gave it strength. Why didn't I think of putting people praying next to *Adoration* myself? I regret making myself known during those protests. I told those who were praying who I was and wanted to take photos – documentation. They didn't let me take photos of my own work, quoting legal articles to me. I was attacked, everyone got out a camera, a phone and started taking photos. I had that gear shoved in my face, pushed down my throat. A camera war. During the next demonstration I didn't make myself known, and they were all standing there with their crosses and crests and shouting 'Shame!' That made a huge impression on me. I wanted to take the cross with the red-and-white flags embedded in it on the pretext that I'd put it in the room with *Adoration*, to have it for myself. But I was afraid that they'd recognise me. Now, at the exhibition 'Crimestory' at CSW in Toruń,

¹⁸ Jan Bodakowski, 'Fotorelacja wystawa Polska Sztuka Narodowa', *Frona.pl*; Marek Horodniczy, 'Koncesjonowana sztuka narodowa', *Rzeczpospolita* 7 June 2012. See Iwona Kurz, 'Gol, kicz, ojczyzna', *Dwutygodnik.com* 2012, 85.

I'm showing the documentation from the protests, *Confession* – a work from two years ago, where I confessed to a priest about my art [...].¹⁹

Of course, this situation can be interpreted as taking a superior, quasi-anthropological position, that of an observer with no intention of discussing with the protestors. A similar position was taken, for example, by the 'culture people' community towards various groups picketing Julita Wójcik's work. As long as there are no acts of arson or nationalist-hooligan blockades of reconstruction of the work, opposition is regarded as a peculiar kind of folklore. Perhaps this position, in fact imbued with an ironic disregard, conceals one of the fundamental problems of the contemporary space of dispute: the folklorization of practices of opposition. At the same time, though, this approach permits at least the possibility of the two sides in the disagreement being present in public space, rather than antagonistic appropriation of this space.

The action that Markiewicz opted for – documentation of the protest and incorporating it into his artistic work – can be compared to the strategy of counter-opposition adopted by organizers of public readings of *Golgota Picnic* in 2014. The energy of indignation behind the rightist protests was channelled into a significant element of artistic actions, which took the form of political declarations directly engaging participants in the public dispute. The protests against García's play became the context for public readings. This is audible in the Bôlt Records recording of a Warsaw reading of the play, where protestors inadvertently played the role of an expressive chorus performing an unwritten core of noise. The mixture of cries, songs, prayers, and the din of whistles, trumpets and percussion forms a fascinating dialogue with the text of the play, at the level of both content and the aesthetics. The result is a magnificent setting provided by protestors for the reading of the text, including a substitute for the stench so important in García's work (in the play, it is the smell of decaying meat), by dispersing a liquid used for scaring off wild boar.

One could say that the organizers of the *Golgota Picnic* readings replaced the Malta Festival management in the function of artistic curators, arranging a network of events in which social dissatisfaction became one of the main raw materials of social and artistic activities. They entered the role of 'curators of social indignation' that had been so attractive to creators of the exhibition 'Polish National Art', as well as Kazimierz Piotrowski, curator of the exhibition and community happening 'Thymós: The Art of Anger 1900–2011' at CSW in Toruń (2011–2012). Along with his efforts to present social anger, Piotrowski decided to create the anger of the community by incorporating works of artist acquaintances in a political context of which they were unaware – as if the indignation of manipulated art people was to form a symmetry with that of the right, convinced of the constant manipulation of society of contemporary Poland. Piotrowski decided – to use Peter Sloterdijk's phraseology – to implant rage into the project by pursuing the micro-politics of anarchizing revenge in the selected field.²⁰ Yet what the

¹⁹ Jacek Markiewicz in conversation with Joanna Ruszczyk, "Adoracja" Jacka Markiewicza', *Wysokie Obcasy.pl* 18 April 2014.

²⁰ Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time*, pp. 211.

organizers of the *Golgota Picnic* readings most wanted to use energy of indignation for was to create a space for debate.

In the Polish context, the model point of reference for curatorial actions of this type was Goshka Macuga's exhibition 'untitled' (Zachęta 2011–2012), with the subject of censorship of the fine arts in Poland after 1989. Among the elements of the exhibition were press articles on exhibitions where attempts at censorship were made, as well as the set of anti-Semitic letters (often containing threats) received by curator Anda Rottenberg in connection with Harald Szeemann's exhibition 'Watch Out, When You Come Out of Your Own Dreams: You Might Find Yourself in Other People's' (2000–2001), which featured Maurizio Cattelan's renowned sculpture *La nona ora*. Macuga therefore played with the documentation of conservative indignation and attempts at censorship, yet she did this not to describe reality but to create a space of dialogue – as the arrangement of the exhibition led visitors to guest books on public display. The written opinions or even disputes over specific works, accruing during the exhibition, became an integral part of it, as well as a record of informal discussion.

The organizers of the readings of *Golgota Picnic* employed a similar strategy: they attempted to harness accumulated emotions to carry out a nationwide discussion. The symbol of this was the Poznań reading of the play script, combined with actual debate in public space played out simultaneously on the city's Freedom Square. In the framework of agonistic dispute that was demarcated, a confrontation of two world views ensued, but despite various threats there were no acts of violence. Instead, there was a performance of democracy.

Translated by Ben Koschalka

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ABSTRACT

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**Golgota Picnic and the Framework of Public Discourse:
Performing Democracy and Managing Social Indignation**

The article analyses the conflict concerning the performance of Rodrigo García's play *Golgota Picnic* during the 2014 Malta Festival in Poznań as evidence of deeper social problems with the shape of public discourse in Poland. The author analyses the framework of public discourse with reference to the cultural disputes that frequently accompany specific cultural texts (exhibitions, plays, concerts). He makes use of the concepts of Chantal Mouffe to explore the ways in which Poles mobilise and clash over topics associated with cultural divisions, and how they use these disputes to perform democracy. The author argues that searching for new forms of articulation and performance of cultural disputes and social conflicts offers an opportunity to cultural institutions, which can not only use them to defend their independence, but can also enter the role of curators of social emotions and provide a framework for the emergence of a dispute